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Ballots sent out blank

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Thousands of primary ballots are being shipped to city and town halls across Maine without the names of any candidates on them.

But it's intentional. They're for the Libertarian Party primaries on June 9.

Libertarians won official status as a political party this year, prompting the state to print about 80,000 ballots for the party primaries. Ballots will be available for each of the 186 legislative and numerous county races across Maine.

However, only two House races have official Libertarian candidates listed on ballots. District 8, which includes Arundel, Kennebunkport and Lyman, is one. The other is District 70, which includes Durham and parts of Auburn, Lisbon and Brunswick.

In all other districts, the ballot instruction "vote for one" is followed by a blank space.

The third-party primary may lack candidates, but it does have some historical significance. It will be the first one held in Maine in at least half a century.

Ballots cost an average of 16 cents each to print, and the overall cost to the state for the Libertarian primary is expected to exceed \$20,000, according to the secretary of state's office.

Most of the ballots probably won't be used, perhaps proving that democracy doesn't always come cheaply.

The Libertarian Party is using its newfound status to give independent voters a rare chance to vote in legislative primaries. But with no candidates to vote for, few independents are expected to take advantage of the opportunity. Only enrolled Libertarians are eligible as write-in candidates.

Democrats and Republicans don't allow independents to vote for their nominees.

Libertarian primaries may be short-lived, however. For the party to retain its official status, its presidential candidate, Andre Marrou, must receive at least 5 percent of the Maine presidential votes this year.